

## IX.

# MEMMOIRS

## OF

# LITERATURE.

MONDAY, May 8, 1710.

*To be continued Weekly.*

## I.

A LETTER, containing some Reflexions upon Tragedy, by Father Souciet.

SIR,

**T**HE Critique you were pleas'd to send me upon the Performance of Mr. ----- was very just, and discover'd a fine Taste; but give me Leave to show you why I think the Author has not divid'd to the Bottom of the Subject.

Tragedy should Reform the Manners; especially a Tragedy where the Catastrophe is Fatal, and the Hero suffers the Punishment due to his Crime. This ought to inspire the Spectator with an Horror for the Vice he sees represented. But to effect this, it should make him apprehensive of Suffering the Consequences of a Crime, which he sees punish'd in the Person of another. Now, he is incapable of the Impression, unless, 1. He plainly sees the Vice is punish'd. 2. Unless he is forc'd to own, that that Vice is the very same which he himself is guilty of. To convince him of the One without showing him the Other, would only flatter his Passion with a Prospect of Impunity. And to discover the Punishment, without Awakening the Conscience, would only raise an uncertain Dislike to Vice in general, as display'd in the Character of another; and consequently, he can never be prevail'd upon to abandon what he thinks himself so much a Stranger to.

Tho' both these Things are absolutely necessary to obtain the End of Tragedy, an Author generally confines himself to the first. He thinks he has succeeded very well in his Performance, by exercising Poetical Justice to Of-

fenders: And yet the Punishment he inflicts, is very often liable to Misapplication, and very seldom capable of making the least Impression upon the Audience; who look upon it at best as the ingenious Contrivance of a Poet's Fancy. As for the Second, the Poet seems to leave it to the Spectator: Thus much at least is evident, that nothing now-a-days is more neglected, nothing perhaps so little understood. Nay, it is frequently reckoned among the Perfections of a Piece, to make it impossible for the Spectator to have any Conviction of his Guilt. To explain my self, I shall observe from *Aristotle*, That "in order to possess the Minds of an Audience with Fear, the Orator must make 'em perceive, that, considering the Circumstances they are in, they have just Cause to be apprehensive; since others of greater Merit have fallen in to the Misfortunes they are threatned with. He must show 'em, how Persons exactly like themselves, have suffer'd Misfortunes where they least expected them, and when they thought themselves the most secure from Danger. Let us apply this to the Representations of the Theatre.

To be under any Apprehension, the Spectator must first believe himself equally Guilty, and as deserving of Punishment as the Person before his Eyes. But now, Self Love does busily interpose, and strives to metamorphose Vices into Virtues; at least she has the Art to soften and extenuate them, till by degrees they almost disappear. The Poet joins in Concert to deceive him into an Opinion of his Innocence; at least to persuade him, that he is far from being upon the same Level with the Hero, and therefore can't with any Justice be involv'd in the same Misery. Both carry on the Cheat; Self-Love diminishes the Vices of the Spectator, while the Poet magnifies those of the Hero. He would have despair'd of Success, if he had not painted him in the  
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most flagrant Colours, set off his subtle Turns, his dark Disguise, and heightned all the Rage and Horror of a boundless Passion. These Images, I confess, wrought up by a masterly Hand, can't fail of Pleasing the Spectator; but will they Reform him? Quite the contrary: For no sooner he withdraws his Attention from the Play, and reflects upon his own Conduct, but he finds so vast a Disproportion between the Errors of his Life and those Enormities upon which the Poet displays his Justice; that 'tis no wonder he is not afraid of Suffering for Crimes he was never guilty of, and which perhaps no body in the World ever was, with all that Circumstance describ'd upon the Stage. This is not I, *says he*; my Passions never hurry'd me so far: I'm not that Cruel, Base, Ambitious Wretch.

The Spectator, therefore, must be presented with an Example, not more Criminal than he finds himself to be. He must be convinc'd, in spite of all the Insinuations of Self-Love, that he is equally culpable with the Person he sees involv'd in Misery, the natural Consequence of a Passion like his own. Without this Art of touching him with Remorse, 'tis impossible to make him Apprehensive of Misfortunes, and consequently to Reform his Morals.

The Poet, for instance, introduces upon the Stage the Character of one Case-harden'd in Impiety, a most accomplish'd Villain; perhaps another, whose Soul's as black as Hell, a base, perfidious, cruel, barbarous Monster. Do you think now, he can find out one among his Audience, who will believe himself plung'd into the same Abyss of Guilt? Let him ransack the Globe, chuse out the most profligate Wretches breathing, then fill the Boxes, Pit and Galleries; I challenge him to show me One of all that Crowd, who will not bless himself, and think his Soul as pure as Snow, a perfect Pattern of Virtue, compar'd with either of those Characters.

You see then, why, according to *Aristotle's* Rule, "He must chuse a Hero, who is not properly a Criminal, but Unfortunate; One who is become Miserable, not by Malice, but Mistake, by such Inadvertencies as Men of Figure and Reputation are obnoxious to."

This was the Art which those great Masters the Ancients practis'd to Perfection. Was *Greece* to be purg'd from Incests, or such other vile Enormities, which overflow'd the State? An *Oedipus* is brought upon the Scene. Was ever Mortal so severely chastis'd, for Errors so pardonable? Could any, in the like Case, be less to blame than he? Another Irregularity to be redress'd, is the insolent Behaviour of Children to their Parents, who sometimes go so far as to make an Attempt upon that Life which first gave them Being. By what Example now shall they stand corrected? That of *Orestes*, and *Alcmeon*. *Orestes*, the Son of an Adulteress, who became the Murderer of her Royal Husband, and then usurp'd the Government, which, with

her own Person, she surrendered to the Pleasure of the Adulterer. *Alcmeon*, in Obedience to his Father's Commands, reveng'd his Blood upon *Euriphyle*, who had been accessory to his Death. They both were Matricides, 'tis true; but they were in a manner forc'd by the Obligation of Duty; And as *Ovid* says of the latter,

*Ultusque parente parentem.  
Facto pius & sceleratus eodem.*

And yet for this Transgression, how deserving soever of Indulgence, they are both delivered up by the Gods to the Torments of the infernal Furies.

*Thyestes* had betray'd a Weakness, of which there were but too many Examples: But he had all the Reason in the World to hope, his Fault would be forgiven, or forgot. How vain his Hope! nor Time, nor Distance can calm the Resentment of his Brother *Atreus*. No Tie of Blood, nor Voice of Nature, nor all the Horror of a monstrous Crime, could mitigate his Vengeance. The Sincerity, the Confidence, wherewith he surrender'd himself to the Discretion of his Enemy; his profound Submissions to him, could make no Impression upon *Atreus*; nothing could extinguish or assuage his Fury. At the sight now of such an Example, what will be the Language of a Spectator, involv'd in the same Guilt as *Thyestes*? Such an Affront will never be forgiven. Shall I gratify a Passion, which will be attended with inevitable Ruin?

These are the Models which Writers must copy after, to make their Tragedies more Instructive and Moral. Whereas the Representation of such monstrous Characters, before taken Notice of, have no tendency to refine the Passions, can make no Impression upon any, but those who have a Resemblance to 'em; that is to say, such a Tragedy can never be serviceable to any, but such Spectators as are never present, are no where to be found, perhaps were never yet in Being; to Monsters, which Nature only forms by one at a time, and that in the compass of many Ages. Glorious Advantage to a Commonwealth! Can human Society then be purg'd from nothing but such outrageous Crimes? No doubt it may; and according to the System of the Ancients, Tragedy was serviceable to the Audience, who daily frequented the Theatre, to such as by their continual Irregularities and Vices disturb'd the Order of Human Society. They touch'd 'em with Remorse, and made them own, I am as bad, or rather worse than he: If his Crime is punish'd so severely, how sad will be my Fate? But the Poet perhaps will object, that he paints after the Life, that he can't soften the Vices of his Hero, without changing his Character; and to shock the Audience, who know how he stands describ'd in History, would be directly contrary to *Horace's* Rule,

*Aut famam sequere, aut sibi convenientia fi ge,  
Scriptor.*



If so, let him lay aside the Subject and chuse another; for this will never do. But then you urge, the Subjects for Tragedy will be strangely reduc'd; according to this Establishment, how few will pass Muster upon the Stage? Pray don't mistake, it is not I, but Reason and good Sense, that make the Limitation: 'Tis Experience, and the Maxims of *Aristotle*, taken from the best Poets of his time. He informs us in the 13th Chap. of his Art of Poetry, that the first Writers of Tragedy took a greater Latitude, but as Time and Reflexion improv'd their Taste, they confin'd themselves to a small number of Families to furnish out Subjects proper for Tragedy. And how many of those do you think he allows? Why, notwithstanding the great Compass which the Fable affords, they don't amount to above five or six; and what's very Remarkable, they are all within the Rules I am pleading for. *Alcmeon*, *Oedipus*, *Orestes*, *Thyestes*, which I have already mention'd. *Meleager*, who was brought to Death by his own Mother, for having in the first Sallies of his Passion reveng'd an Affront, he had received from his Two Uncles. The last is *Telephus*, who was wounded fighting for his Countrey, and the Interest of his Allies. Not that I am for copying the Ancients in ev'ry thing. Idolatry consider'd apart, even their best Pieces, are sometimes founded upon Principles of Religion and Morality, perfectly incompatible with the Manners of our State, and the Genius of our Stage. But I have already exceeded the Bounds of a Letter.

I am, &c.

## II.

### A L E T T E R concerning the *Mischnah*, by the same Hand.

IT's not so easy, Sir, as you may imagine, to satisfy your Curiosity, by giving you a compleat Notion of the *Mischnah* printed in *Holland* under the Direction of Mr. *Surenbusius*, concerning which you complain, That the Journalists leave you entirely in the Dark. A Work, Sir, containing Six Volumes in *Folio*, where ev'ry Page almost may furnish Matter for some Observations, is enough to discourage one from the Perusal. Besides, you know, my Time has been engag'd by Studies of greater Importance and Advantage.

However, Sir, I can't dispence with my self from obeying the repeated Instances you make upon this Subject, which with me must always have the weight of an express Command. By good Fortune we have had the Book for some time; and now I am in a Condition to give you Satisfaction.

The *תלמוד*, *Thalmud*, is a Body of the Jewish Law, or a System of Practical Divinity, in which the Duties are explained, Doubts are clear'd, Cases of Conscience answer'd, not by Reasoning, but Authority, by the Custom of the Nation, and the Decisions of their ancient Doctors. This *Thalmud* you know, Sir, is

compos'd in general of two Parts; the one is call'd *משנה*, *Mischnah*, the other *גמרא*, *Gemara*, which also frequently assumes the Name of *Thalmud*, from that common to the whole Work. Mr. *Surenbusius* has only printed the *Mischnah*, or First Part, reserving the Second to some other Opportunity.

This *Thalmud* so much boasted of, not only by the Jews, but even by a great many Judaizing Christians, and so slighted on the contrary by others, does not indeed deserve the extravagant Praises of the one side, nor the immoderate Contempt of the other. And to confine my self to the Work before us, the *Mischnah* is evidently the most ancient Part of the *Thalmud*, the best writ, the most abounding with good Sense, the freest from Fables and all those ridiculous Stories which you have read in *Morin*, and some other of our Writers. Not that it does not abound with a thousand Things, to appearance little better than Trifles. 'Twas the Genius of that Nation to be scrupulously Exact, nay frequently Superstitious in the Performance of their Duties: And the Old and New Testament show us by numerous Examples, what Extrems that People were capable of running into, and consequently that the most extravagant Things we find related in the Treatises of the *Mischnah*, are far from being incredible.

However, there are an infinite Number of Passages, and sometimes entire Treatises, full of Reasoning and good Sense. The *Perk Avoth* deserves this Character throughout, and contains a great many curious and moral Subjects, which are handled with so much Skill and Judgment, as would contribute to the Reputation of those, who look with scorn upon any Production of the Jews.

'Tis true, Wit, Eloquence, and Sublime; we are not to expect. The Jewish Writers never studied to please by the Turn, the Delicacy or the Loftiness of their Thoughts; their Books are far from being Models in the Art of Speaking or Writing well.

The Principal Advantage of this Work is to relate and explain the Opinions, Manners, Customs, Laws, Ceremonies, and Superstitions of the Jewish Nation, in order chiefly to give us a right Understanding of the Scriptures, both of the Old and New Testament. For to explain the Manner how a Precept was put in practise, oft times shows the Meaning of the Terms in which that Precept is express'd, much better than all the Commentaries of the most skilful Interpreters.

Besides, these Authors having resided in the Eastern Countries, were much better acquainted than we can be, with their Customs, Arts, and Manners which are necessary to be known, in order to a right Understanding of many obscure Passages in the Sacred Writings.

In a Word, the *Mischnah* makes the same Figure in the *Thalmud*, as the Digests do in the Body of the Roman-Law; That is to say, a Compilation of the Decisions made by their Ancient Doctors, the Explanations they gave to the Laws of *Moses*, the Duties of the Jews, and their Opinions upon the different Cases that might happen.

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The Name of *Mischnah*, in Hebrew מִשְׁנָה, shews the Value the Jews have for this Compilation, and signifies in strict Propriety *Second Law*; as if by such a Title they intended that this Collection has the same Authority with the Books of *Moses*; and that if the *Pentateuch* was the first Law, the *Mischnah* is the Second.

This *Hebrew Digest* was compil'd by the Famous *Rabbi Juda*, surnam'd the Holy, the Phoenix of his Age, says *Maimonides*: He liv'd according to the Chronology of the Jews, in the Year of the World 3910, being about the middle of the Second Century, under the Emperor *Antoninus*: And if we may believe *David Gantz*, and *Rabbi Seviria Gaon*, he made this Collection in the Year of the World 3978. i. e. A. D. 218, 148 Years after the Destruction of the Temple. If you will take their Word, he was assist'd by Divine Inspiration; and every thing appear'd marvelous in the Execution of his Design.

He divided the Work into Six Parts, which the Jews call סֵדְרִים *Orders*. *M. Surenhusius* has followed that Method, by Dividing his Edition into Six Tomes; each of which contain a *Seder*, or Order of the *Mischnah*; and he has furnish'd the Reader with all the Advantages necessary to make this Work understood; with this View. 1. He always joins a *Latin Translation* to the *Hebrew Text* of the *Mischnah*. 2. He gives us the *Latin Translation* of the Commentaries of *Rabbi Moses*, Son of *Maimon*, and *Rabbi Abdias*, Two of the greatest Esteem among the Jews. 3. He adds the Works and Notes of the Learned, who for these Two Ages have writ upon any part of the *Mischnah*: And at last he gives his own Observations. The Work therefore contains Five or Six different Parts; which, to avoid all manner of Confusion, he has ranged in the following Order. The Text and the *Latin* lie in Two Columns, the *Hebrew* on the Left, and the Translation on the Right, with respect to the Reader. Underneath this Double Text are plac'd in Two Columns also the Commentaries of the Two Rabbins abovementioned, in *La-*

tin only, that of *R. Abdias* under the *Hebrew*, and that of *R. Moses* under the Translation of the Text. Then follow the Notes of the Learned Moderns, and those of the Editor. But the Translation of the *Hebrew Text* is not always done by *M. Surenhusius*. *Mr. Guise* has translated almost all the First; *Sebastian Schmid*, formerly Professor of Divinity at *Strasburg*, has done near one Third Part of the Second: *Robert Sheringham*, of *Cambridge*, and others, have furnish'd the Version of several Treatises in the Third: *Constantine l'Empereur*, and others, a great part of the Fourth. In the Fifth Tome, *M. Arnold* has translated the *Thamid*, and l'Empereur the Treatise concerning the Measures of the Temple; accompany'd with very Learned Observations. The Sixth is entirely by *M. Surenhusius*. These Versions are generally attended with Notes by the respective Authors: So that this Edition contains almost all the Works, which, for Two Centuries, have been writ upon the *Mischnah*. Every Tome concludes with Three Tables: The First for the Texts of Scripture; The Second for the *Hebrew Words* and Phrases, explain'd by the Rabbins; And the Third, in *Latin*, is a Table of Matter for the whole Work. The Patrons, which our Author has chose, are Persons of the most Distinguish'd Character. The First Volume is dedicated to the Consuls of *Amsterdam*; The Second to the Great Duke of *Tuscany*; The Third to *Cardinal de Medici*; The Fourth to the Magistrates of *Groningen*; The Fifth to the University of *Leyden*; And the Last to *Robert Harley*, Esq;

This, Sir, is the best Account I can give you of the Edition of the *Mischnah*, printed at *Amsterdam*. I have nothing more to add but the Title, which runs thus:

MISCHNA, sive totius Hebræorum, Juris, Rituum, Antiquitatum, ac Legum Oralium Systema, cum clarissimorum Rabbīnorum Maimonidis, & Bartenoræ Commentariis integris. Quibus accedunt Variorum Auctorum Notæ ac Versiones in eos quos ediderunt Codices. Latinitate donavit, ac Notis illustravit Guilielmus Surenhusius, &c.

#### ROSTOCK in Germany.

**M.** Charles Arndius is preparing a very large Work, concerning the History of Literature. It is divided into 13 Parts. I. Containing the History of Sciences in general. II. Abridgments of the Lives of the most Celebrated Authors. III. The History of all Religions. IV. The Origin and Progress of Civil Law, Physick, Philosophy, History, Poetry, and Philology. V. Modern Discoveries in Natural Philosophy and Mathematicks. VI. The History of all the Universities or Colleges, from those supposed to be founded by the *Caldæans*. VII. A Catalogue of all the Libraries, &c. VIII. The History of all the Academies that have been, with the present State of those which now subsist. The other Parts are design'd for Hieroglyphicks, Numbers, Heraldry, &c.

*Systema Scientiæ Literariæ Historico-pragmaticum.*

#### AIX LA CHAPELLE.

**T**HE following Epigram has been lately made upon the Hot Baths of this City.

Vidit Aquisgranum, terras dum lustrat & arbes,  
Alma Venus; geniumque loci mirata lacusque,  
Hoc, dixit, locus est haud dignior ullus amore.  
Fam valeant arcus, ignitaque spicula. Posthac  
Unda cupidineis incendet pectora flammis.  
Sic fatur, natumque vocans, jubet ire natatum,  
Ceruleaque ardentem deferre in Balnea tædam.  
Exequitur mandata puer: cum lampade in undas  
Inflit, & nixæ sparguntur gurgite pennæ.  
Dum natat, algentes cecidit scintilla per undas,  
Incaluitque vadum. Liquida contagia flammæ  
Sensit posteritas. Quicunque hic lavit, amavit.

LONDON: Printed by J. Roberts: And Sold by A. Baldwin, near the Oxford-Arms in Warwick-Lane. (Price 2 d.)